

ALCOHOL USE DISORDER

PUBLIC HEALTH BRIEF

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WHAT IS ALCOHOL USE DISORDER?^{1,2,5}

Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD), is a pattern of alcohol use that involves problems controlling your drinking, being preoccupied with alcohol, or continuing to use alcohol even when it causes problems. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism define drinking in moderation as limiting intake to 2 drinks or less in a day for men, and 1 drink or less in a day for women.

Excessive alcohol use is responsible for more than 140,000 deaths in the United States every year. In people aged 20-39, about 13.5% of total deaths are attributed to alcohol. More than 50% of US adults consume alcohol, while 17% binge drink.

Symptoms of Alcohol Use Disorders can include the following:

- Being unable to limit the amount of alcohol you drink
- A craving for, or strong need to drink alcohol
- Feeling anxious or irritable when not drinking
- Giving up social or work activities to use alcohol
- Using alcohol in situations where it is unsafe (swimming, driving)
- Continuing to drink alcohol when you know it is causing physical, social, work, or relationship problems.

Drinking too much alcohol on a single occasion, over time, can have a multitude of negative health outcomes on the body's most vital organs and processes including:

Brain: alcohol interferes with the brain's communication pathways, and can affect the way the brain looks and works.

Heart: causing high blood pressure, stroke, and arrhythmias.

Liver: Fatty Liver- when the liver stores extra fat from alcohol use. This is the first stage of Alcohol-Related Liver Disease (ARLD).

Alcoholic Hepatitis- the inflammation of the liver from alcohol use.

Cirrhosis- scarring of the liver from said inflammation, causing permanent damage. This is the final stage of ARLD.

Pancreas: drinking can cause the pancreas to release toxic substances resulting in acute and chronic pancreatitis.

Cancer: because alcohol is carcinogenic, long-term heavy drinking can lead to certain types of cancers including liver, breast, colorectal, head, and neck cancers.

Immunity: alcohol can weaken the immune system. Chronic drinkers are more liable to contract diseases like pneumonia and tuberculosis.

Pregnancy: there is no safe amount of alcohol use during pregnancy. Alcohol in the mother's blood passes to the baby through the umbilical cord and can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, and intellectual, physical, and behavioral disabilities, amongst others.

Sources:

1. National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-effects-health/alcohol-effects-body>
2. Center for Disease Control. Alcohol Use Basics. <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets.htm>
3. CRISP Reporting Services
4. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System
5. World Health Organization. Alcohol. https://www.who.int/health-topics/alcohol#tab=tab_1
6. HCHD. Behavioral Health. <https://harfordcountyhealth.com/behavioral-health-new-page/behavioral-health-community-based-behavioral-health-treatment-and-support-services/>

DATA^{3,4}

Alcohol-Related Substance Use Disorder ED Visits, 2022:
Harford County - 2,489 visits
Maryland - 57,509 total visits (69% Male / 31% Female)

Alcohol Use in High School Students 2018:
Harford County - 31%
Maryland - 24.1%

Alcohol Use in Middle School Students 2018:
Harford - 8.4%
Maryland - 7.5%

SPOTLIGHT: UNDERAGE DRINKING

In 2019, 7 million youth ages 12 to 20 claimed to have consumed alcohol within the last month in the United States. Studies also show that when youth do drink alcohol, they drink more through binge drinking. 4.2 million youth reported binge drinking at least once in the past month. Drinking at a younger age can interfere with brain development and can increase the risk of alcohol problems later in life. Alcohol is also a significant factor in deaths in youth along with physical injury.

As children get older, they often assert their independence, seek challenges, and engage in risky behavior. Consuming alcohol is a risk behavior that is attractive to many youth. Other reasons they drink is due to peer pressure, stress, or an increased desire for alcohol

TREATMENT OPTIONS¹

Most people with an Alcohol Use Disorder can benefit from some form of treatment. Treatment may involve a range of options, such as brief intervention, individual or group counseling, outpatient programs, or residential treatment stay. Others include FDA-approved medications that block pleasure sensors in the brain or cause unpleasant symptoms when consuming alcohol, behavior therapy and mutual support groups.

PREVENTION²

Anyone can contribute to the prevention of excessive alcohol use. You can do the following:

Choose not to drink too much or at all yourself, and urge others to do the same. If you do choose to drink alcohol, follow the guidelines of 2 drinks for men and one for women in one day.

Communities and governments can also get involved by formulating and implementing appropriate policies and programs and regulating the marketing of alcoholic beverages, especially to young people.

LOCAL RESOURCES⁶

The Harford County Health Department has many different services including Behavioral Health Treatment and Support Services which provides an array of outpatient treatment options and support services for individuals suffering from substance use disorders, mental illness, or co-occurring conditions.